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Why Serve Breakfast At School?

More and more schools are finding that it makes sense to offer breakfast to their students. Three articles tell why. **Page 2**

Summer Food Program

Summer's almost here, and FNS is enlisting sponsors for the Summer Food Program for Children. This year, the agency is making a special effort to get sponsors. **Page 7**



A Pennsylvania County Reorganizes Its Food Programs

Three years ago, Lancaster County formed a task force to improve food and nutrition services to low-income residents. Today the county has a new well-coordinated program, offering several projects. **Page 8**

Why Serve Breakfast At School?

More and more schools are finding that it makes sense to offer breakfast to their students. The following articles tell why.

The first is an interview with Margaret Glavin, Acting Director of the FNS School Programs Division. The second is a general article, with details on how several schools have built well-attended programs. The third is a two-part feature which illustrates some of the ways community groups can help expand the School Breakfast Program.

"So children won't have to start the day hungry"

Q How many children now have access to breakfast at school?

A Currently, the School Breakfast Program is available to approximately 10.3 million children in 23,000 schools. An average of 2.7 million children actually take part in the program on a daily basis.

Q Are you satisfied with the growth of the program?

A No. I want the program to be available to more children, and more needy children in particular. Not enough children have the option of

eating breakfast at school.

There has been substantial growth in the program since it began as a pilot program in 1966. In June 1967 the end of the program's first year, there were 210 schools taking part. By 1972, the number of participating schools had reached 6,609, and our latest figures show a nearly fourfold increase over 1972.

However, it's important to keep in mind that in comparison to the 23,000 schools participating in the School Breakfast Program, there are 92,600 schools participating in the National School Lunch Program.

We need to convince schools that it's just as important to serve breakfast as it is to serve lunch. And, it's a lot easier to serve breakfast. The



School Breakfast Program is really a very simple program to operate. The meal is easy to prepare and serve.

Q What are the benefits of the School Breakfast Program? To children? To parents? To schools?

A To begin with, children get nutritious meals. Beyond that, they get the opportunity to learn by example—they get to see what nutritious breakfasts look like. Children learn that it's very important to begin the day with nourishing meals.

Parents benefit from the peace of mind in knowing that if their children haven't eaten at home, they will get good food at school and will be able to participate fully in the day's lessons.

Breakfast is probably the most important meal of the day for children. In most schools, the basic academic subjects—arithmetic, reading, writing—are taught in the morning. If a child isn't alert and operating at full capacity in the morning, he or she will probably miss out on some very important instruction.

By having breakfast programs, schools can decrease the likelihood that their students will be distracted by hunger. Many schools report that when children eat nutritious breakfasts they are better behaved, less subject to fatigue, and less inclined to be absent.

Q Why don't more schools join the program? What do you think is the major barrier blocking their participation?

A One of the major barriers, I believe, is fear of cost. Schools think the program will cost them more money than they will get back in reimbursement. In most cases, this is not true because schools receive reimbursement for all breakfasts served.

Moreover, schools are reimbursed in accordance with national rates, which are adjusted twice a year. Since these adjustments are based on changes in the Consumer Price Index, schools can be assured that reim-

bursement levels will keep pace with any increases in the costs of preparing and serving food.

Under the rates now in effect, States receive 11.50 cents for each breakfast schools serve to paying children. They get an additional 21.75 cents for each breakfast schools serve to children qualifying for reduced-price meals, and an additional 28.75 cents for each breakfast schools serve to children qualifying for free meals.

For schools which State agencies designate as "especially needy," the reimbursement rates are higher. These schools get 11.50 cents for each "paid" breakfast, the same as other schools. But for each "reduced-price" breakfast they are eligible to receive up to a maximum 45.25 cents, and for each "free" breakfast, up to a maximum of 50.25 cents.

Schools may be designated "especially needy" if they meet special financial criteria.

Many schools are finding themselves in financial crunches these days and are cutting back on all but essential services. At times, a relatively new program, like the breakfast program, is finding it hard to gain acceptance.

In such schools, we need to make sure that States have informed school administrators about how the reimbursement rates work and about the importance of the program to the children.

Q Aside from cost, what are some of the other barriers? And how are they being overcome?

A A second barrier is that contracts sometimes prevent teachers and other staff members from supervising children in the cafeteria. One way schools can remedy this is to use breakfast program reimbursement funds to hire personnel to supervise in the cafeteria. Or, schools can ask neighborhood volunteers to do the supervision.

Our experience has shown that the

breakfast period is generally a quiet time. The children tend to be well behaved, so supervision really isn't a problem.

A third barrier to the program is the idea that breakfast is solely a family responsibility. Many people feel that schools *shouldn't* serve breakfasts. Our response is simply that the breakfast program provides the option of eating breakfast at school. When, for whatever reason, children don't have access to breakfast at home, the school option is very important.

Q What do children ordinarily pay for breakfasts?

A The price of breakfast ranges from free up to 50 cents or more. Since local schools set the prices, they can vary widely. However, most schools charge about 25 cents for full-price meals and 5 to 10 cents for reduced-price meals.

Q Are child care centers eligible for the School Breakfast Program?

A No. Child care centers are not eligible for the School Breakfast Program. However, if they qualify for the Child Care Food Program, they may receive reimbursement for breakfasts, as well as lunches, suppers and snacks.

Q What is FNS doing to encourage breakfast program expansion?

A First, we're requiring all States to have outreach programs. In addition, we're requiring all States to inform schools about the "especially needy provision." Sometimes, the extra money provided through this provision can make the difference in whether or not a school joins the breakfast program.

Q Could you elaborate on the role of the States?

A Yes. States have a big role to play. Part of it involves educational efforts to make people aware

that the program is available to all children, not just needy children. Another part involves working directly with school administrators to convince them of the benefits of the program.

Besides giving local school administrators general information on how reimbursement works, State staffs can estimate what the program will cost individual school districts. Then they can compare these projected costs to the reimbursement schools will earn.

In a nutshell, the role of the State people is to convince local administrators to start the program.

Some States are doing more to expand the program than others. Five States—Ohio, Texas, New York, Massachusetts, and Michigan—have mandated breakfast programs. The mandates work differently, but generally, the States focus on establishing the program first in schools with a high percentage of needy children. Later, they work on expanding it to other schools.

Q What does a local school or community have to do to get the breakfast program started?

A To start a program, a school must apply to the State Department of Education and agree to follow certain basic rules.

First, the school must agree to serve breakfasts that meet the minimal requirements as set by the Secretary of Agriculture. These minimum requirements are: a serving of fruit, vegetable or juice; milk; and bread or cereal. We encourage schools to also serve a meat or meat alternate as often as possible.

Second, the school must agree to serve meals free or at reduced price to needy children.

Third, they must agree not to discriminate against any child on the basis of race, color, national origin, or inability to pay for the meal.

Sometimes community groups have to work to encourage school administrators to start the program. They get best results when they can document the community's interest—with surveys of parents, for example. School board officials are responsive to what their communities want, so if a group can document interest in the breakfast program, the officials will be more likely to help them obtain it.

After the program gets started, community groups can be extremely

helpful in publicizing the availability and benefits of the program. In doing this, they should be careful to explain that the program is for all children, not just the needy children.

Q What are realistic goals for the program? How many children do you expect to reach?

A Ultimately, we want all schools to have breakfast programs. In the near future, we are concentrating on reaching needy children. But we know that children of all economic levels need breakfast, so we want to have it available to non-needy children too.

The point is that we want all children to have the *opportunity* to eat breakfast at school. If they can eat breakfast at home, fine. However, if they have to travel long distances to school, or if their families don't serve breakfast for one reason or another, then we want the school breakfast program to be there so the children won't have to start the day hungry.

by Michael McAteer

People see link between breakfast and learning

"Teachers say that many kids who were listless and inattentive have higher attention spans since participating in the breakfast program."

—Nina Doner, Detroit School Breakfast Committee

"Schools see much less tardiness and absenteeism once the program gets started."

—Charles Cole, Texas State breakfast program director

Comments like these are convincing subjective evidence that the School Breakfast Program can make a valuable contribution to learning.

Scientific studies, like the Iowa Breakfast Study, lend added credence to the testimony. The Iowa study, published over 15 years ago, firmly established the link between breakfast and performance. The study revealed that children who skip breakfast are often listless and apathetic. By mid-morning, their attention spans and ability to work and concentrate become limited.

Subsequent studies have shown that children who skip breakfast may also suffer from hyperactivity or hyperirritability.

How many children skip breakfast? It's hard to say exactly. One Pennsylvania school district surveyed parents and students over 10 years ago to see if there was a need for a School Breakfast Program. Over 60 families took part in the survey, conducted in the rural community of Northern Bedford. Survey results showed that in nearly half the families children were not eating breakfast before leaving for school.

"No time for breakfast"

In one-third of the families surveyed, mothers and fathers left for work before their children left for school. In other instances, early morning routines interfered with breakfast. Some students said they didn't have time to eat before catching the bus; others said they just weren't hungry before 7:30.

The survey convinced school administrators that many students were suffering nutritionally from poor morning eating habits, a conclusion which may have surprised residents of what the district superintendent describes as an "average" rural community.

One of the first breakfast schools

The Northern Bedford School district was one of the first districts to serve breakfast at school under the pilot program authorized by the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. The program operated on a pilot basis until 1975, when Public Law 94-105 made it a nationwide program available to all schools.

Many program supporters say it's unrealistic to expect breakfast participation to match lunch participation, but, they quickly add, that's no reason not to work to make the program effective.

"Participation in the breakfast program will never be as high as in the school lunch program," says Texas director Charles Cole. One reason, he says, is that the lunch program has the advantage of being operated in the middle of the day, when students are already in school.

"That doesn't mean there isn't a crying need for schools to serve

breakfast," he continues. "You have to remember the children. If you feed even one child who would otherwise go without a nourishing morning meal, you have done a great service."

How does the program work?

The School Breakfast Program is administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in cooperation with State Departments of Education.

The basic meal pattern for the program is simple, which makes the program easy for schools to manage. Schools must serve milk; a fruit, vegetable, or juice; and bread or cereal. As often as possible, schools should also serve protein-rich foods like meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or cheese.

Some schools begin the program serving only cold foods, then add hot foods as the program gets underway.

"The goal of our breakfast program in Detroit is to have hot breakfasts in schools," says Nina Doner, counsel to the Detroit School Breakfast Committee, a coalition of parents and civic and religious groups dedicated to expanding the city's program. "Our first aim, however, is to get a nourishing breakfast to every Detroit child who needs one."

"Cold breakfasts can be just as exciting as hot breakfasts," she adds. "Even in schools with meager facilities, we can vary menus to include treats like muffins and cornbread."

Connecticut's Andover Elementary School began the program this year and asked students to make suggestions for breakfast menus. One student said he was surprised and delighted when the school served his menu selection—cheese pizza, along with fruit and milk.

The school offers students a good deal of variety from day to day. For example, during a recent week, menus included milk and orange juice, ready-to-eat-cereal, and cheese; pears, and waffles with maple syrup; whole wheat toast with peanut butter and bananas.

Schools are reimbursed

All schools are reimbursed for the breakfasts they serve. Those who operate the breakfast program generally agree that with effective and efficient management, reimburse-

ments cover the cost of the meals.

In addition to financial assistance, participating schools also receive federally donated foods and technical assistance and guidance.

Problems and solutions

Many communities originally balked at the idea of starting breakfast programs. Some had obstacles they thought impossible to overcome. Yet, motivated by concern for children, they developed effective solutions.

This year in Pontiac, Michigan, 32 of 34 schools began the breakfast program. Pontiac is a racially mixed community with 58 percent of its students considered needy. The city has mandatory busing and strong unions. Despite these often-cited stumbling blocks, with the support of the community, the Pontiac school board started breakfast programs in all but its two high schools.

In Fresno, California, cultural preferences and life styles made starting the program a real challenge for some schools. Many of the students were children of Spanish-speaking migrant farmworkers, whose early-to-work schedules had not included regular morning meals. The children were not accustomed to eating anything before lunch, even though they were hungry, and many were unfamiliar with traditional breakfast foods.

Through creative planning and attention to the students' tastes, the schools have been able to build well-attended programs. They've found ways to introduce ethnic foods into the breakfast menus—for example, breakfasts sometimes include tortillas and beans. They've found ways to encourage the children to eat "new" foods. School staffs have been working especially hard to increase students' acceptance of milk and to broaden the variety of fruits the children will eat.

Reactions from students, parents, teachers, and school nurses testify to the program's effectiveness in improving mental and physical skills.

Communities find their own approaches

Many other communities have found independent solutions to their problems in starting programs. At eight public hearings held by FNS this fall, students, nutritionists, school ad-

ministrators and legislators testified about their concerns for quality school breakfasts. Witness after witness told how schools had overcome problems of scheduling and transportation.

For example, a New Jersey breakfast program advocate explained how some areas have added flexibility by offering different kinds of breakfast programs at different schools within a district. A North Carolina administrator said that his school had shortened breaks during the day in order to have a breakfast period.

Several witnesses reported that schools had overcome supervisory problems by enlisting PTA members, mothers, and teachers' aids to serve as monitors.

Support for program grows

Once breakfast programs are begun, few communities are willing to give theirs up. In a recent survey, the Dallas, Texas, school food service staff found that 84 percent of the teachers felt free breakfasts had improved students' achievement and attendance patterns; 98 percent called the program beneficial; and a full 100 percent wanted to continue to expand the program.

"As word of the program spreads," says Texas director Charles Cole, "more and more people realized that it costs schools and communities *not* to have a breakfast program. It costs them in learning skills which become depleted from lack of nourishment."

What's more, kids like eating breakfast at school. One Washington, D.C., elementary school principal says that most of his students "don't need to eat breakfast at school," but over half of them do.

"For some kids," he says, "eating at school means getting a meal their families can't afford to give them. But for most, it's just something that they really like to do."

by Linda Feldman

Communities see benefits for children and parents

Public support is often a key element in getting school breakfast programs started. In these two short features, representatives of two advocacy groups tell how their organizations have worked with communities to help build or expand breakfast programs.

- Last spring, the staff of the National Child Nutrition Project decided to mobilize community support to expand the School Breakfast Program in Newark, New Jersey. At the time, only 22 of the city's 90 schools were in the program.

According to director Barbara Zang, the group began by setting up a coordinating committee, which was made up of members of the local community action agency, the city health and welfare departments, and other agencies.

In July, the committee called a city-wide public meeting to explain the benefits of the program and the importance of public support. Attending the meeting were parents, local block clubs, PTA's, social and service organizations, the Urban League, and others.

"When people realized that they could have the program if they wanted it, and that it would benefit most of the children in the city, they immediately pledged to let local officials know of their support of the program," said Barbara Zang. "It was a very spirited meeting, and they were most enthusiastic about establishing the program."

"Next day," she said, "they began to let local school administrators, principals, and the central city school administration know of their interest." They did this by phone, letters, and in person. Meanwhile, the committee met with city school officials to let them know they wanted to expand the program.

"It became apparent," said Zang, "that officials felt the city didn't have the money for the expansion, and they didn't understand fully how the 'especially needy' school designation would work to help them. So we arranged for them to meet with State Department of Education representatives, who explained all the details."

"When city school officials fully understood the reimbursement procedures, they agreed to work to establish the program in all city schools. By last November, the city began bringing in the new schools, and by this April, we expect all 90 public schools to be participating in the program."

Ms. Zang said that by bringing the new schools in, the city made the program available to an additional 36,000 needy children. She said the staff hopes to carry out the same type of activities in other areas of the State.

At the national level, Barbara Zang said that currently the National Child Nutrition Project is in the process of selecting three States in which to target its breakfast outreach activities. It will employ two people in each State who will first establish broadly based State breakfast coalitions. These coalitions will decide where the need is greatest for the program, get the facts on why the program isn't operating, and work to organize community support.

- Anne Meadows, Director of the School Food Advocacy Project of the Children's Foundation, said her organization provides information, technical assistance, organizing help, and guidance to groups that want to establish the breakfast program. The Foundation's national office is in Washington, D.C., but the foundation currently also has two regional offices in Atlanta and in Santa Fe.

Anne Meadows recently visited 10 States where she interviewed people associated with the breakfast program. She wanted to learn about the barriers to the program and to discuss with local people how these might be overcome. She talked to cafeteria managers, parents, school board members, State and local school food service directors, principals, superintendents, and others.

"I found," said Meadows, "that the barriers really aren't insurmountable. If the school district agrees with the idea that school breakfast is ultimately part of the learning process—then it will probably succeed in starting the program."

Based on what she learned in these interviews, Meadows is now preparing a report on school breakfast barriers and how communities have overcome them. The Children's Foundation expects to publish the report this spring. The report will make recommendations on how to make the program

easier to operate and more attractive to school districts.

After the study is published, the foundation will select target areas and try out different strategies for overcoming barriers to the program.

"We've learned," Anne Meadows said, "that the particular strategy you use in a community is dictated by the barrier to the program there. For example, where an administration is not opposed to school breakfast, but just hasn't given it any thought, simply providing information may be all that's needed. But in another district, where the school board is against the program, parents and interested groups must be organized to convince the board of the program's benefit."

"We work with a wide variety of groups," she said. "On the one hand, we may work with statewide anti-hunger coalitions and on the other hand we may work with individual parents who have heard about the program but don't know much about organizing. We provide assistance to meet their needs."

"In some cases, this is as simple as sending information on the program. In others, Children's Foundation staff members may need to help local groups prepare their presentation on the breakfast program for a school board meeting."

"Some of our work is more long range. In one of the largest school districts in one Western State, we found resistance to the program at the school administration level, despite widespread need and desire for the program in the community. After nearly 2 years of 'friendly persuasion' failed to produce results, we circulated a petition among the community to document support of the program. When 70 percent of the students and parents responded favorably, the school district superintendent reluctantly agreed to start the program."

Summing up her work on breakfast, she said, "The School Food Advocacy Project sees its primary constituents as those children who sit in their morning classes—as one principal we interviewed so eloquently put it—'under the influence of hunger.'"

By Michael McAteer



Summer Food Program Expanded In Rural Areas

In past years, the Summer Food Program has operated primarily in urban areas, but this year the Food and Nutrition Service is launching an outreach project to expand the program to more rural areas.

In accordance with Public Law 95-166, the child nutrition legislation enacted in November, FNS is requiring States to identify rural areas in need of summer food programs, and to solicit and assist potential sponsors in these areas.

"We're trying to reach needy children living in small industrial towns, children of migrant workers and sharecroppers, and other needy children not living in urban areas," said Jack Heslin, Food Program Officer working on the Summer Food Program.

"To do this, we need to enlist organizations to sponsor the program."

Schools, local governments, 4-H Clubs, churches and other nonprofit organizations are all eligible to serve as sponsors. They may be public or private nonprofit nonresidential institutions or residential summer camps. Participating sponsors can be reimbursed up to the full operating costs of the program and for administrative costs related to planning, organizing, and supervising the food service for the breakfast program.

Serves meals and snacks

The Summer Food Program provides nutritious meals and mid-morning or mid-afternoon snacks to children from areas of economic

need. The program began in 1969 as a part of the Special Food Service Program for Children. In 1976, it became a separate program—the Summer Food Program for Children.

The program serves children age 18 and younger. Handicapped adults may also take part if they are participating in a public school program for the handicapped.

FNS has asked the Rural Development Service for assistance in coordinating and operating this summer's food program in rural areas. "We need their expertise to help us identify low-income rural counties," said Mr. Heslin, "and we need their suggestions on how to make these areas aware of the benefits available through the Summer Food Program."

"The program not only provides nutritious meals to participants; it also provides employment during the summer months for school food service employees, students, and others," Heslin said.

FNS will report

FNS will be monitoring 20 summer food program project sites in low-income rural counties this summer and will compile a report based on the evaluations of these project sites. Sponsors will use this report to assist them in operating the program more effectively in rural areas in the future.

Organizations interested in sponsoring the Summer Food Program should contact the State Department of Education in their State.
by Marilyn Stackhouse

One County's Combined Food Program

A Pennsylvania County Reorganizes Its Food Programs

It was a simple idea. And a good one. Bring together people from all the different agencies providing food and nutrition services to residents of Lancaster County. Get them to sit down, come up with some common goals, and reorganize their efforts to meet those goals.

Agency overlap would be a thing of the past. And, without duplication of effort, money and manpower could be used more effectively to extend needed services to the county's 49,000 low-income residents.

In 1975, Lancaster County's Community Food and Nutrition Program was just an ambitious proposal submitted to the Community Services Administration. Today, after many months of planning and lots of hard work, the program is fully operational. Its success has generated in-

terest in other Pennsylvania counties as well as in counties in other States.

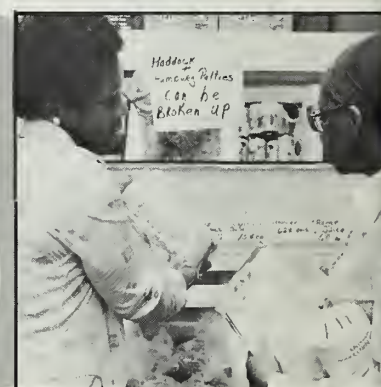
The key to Lancaster's new program is that one agency provides overall direction for food and nutrition activities. While various county agencies still provide individual services, the coordinating agency has general responsibility for program management and outreach.

In putting together their coordinated program, the people in Lancaster not only reorganized existing services, but added some innovative new services as well. For example, the county established three co-operative buying clubs where low- and moderate-income families can purchase quality foods inexpensively. The clubs accept cash or food stamps and serve as nutrition education centers as well as stores. The

county also has three community gardens and a canning center.

Outreach workers report that the new services are gaining support in the community. Besides helping people stretch their food dollars, the clubs, gardens and canning center have helped lessen the isolation some county residents feel. Senior citizens in particular have benefited from the companionship the activities offer.

The following five-part feature gives more details on Lancaster's Combined Food and Nutrition Program. The first section explains how county planners organized the program. The second describes the outreach system which is essential to the combined services concept. And the last three sections tell how the county runs the buying clubs and other special services.



Getting the program started

The first efforts to organize the new program began in the summer of 1975, with a series of weekly meetings chaired by Doris Thomas, home economist for Pennsylvania State University's Cooperative Extension Service.

The meetings included representatives from seven other agencies—the State Health Department, the Lancaster Community Action Program (CAP), the County Board of Assistance, the Council of Churches, the Visiting Nurses' Association, the Office of Aging, and the City Bureau of Health.

"We started by brainstorming on what we should be accomplishing," Doris Thomas recalls. The group worked first to identify target populations and communities, then explored various alternatives that might meet the needs of those populations. The group came up with 38 goals in all and began matching them to individual programs.

Looked for duplication

By taking a close look at what each agency was already doing, task force members singled out areas where they could eliminate duplication.

They came up with some interesting solutions. For example, Penn State Extension Service agreed to phase out its involvement in transportation, so that all transportation provided to low-income persons would be consolidated under CAP. Both Penn State and CAP consented to cut down on their involvement in emergency food provisions, turning this responsibility over to the Council of Churches, which was operating the food banks.

The Community Food and Nutrition Program began to take shape. The Community Action Agency would take on the overall responsibility, with the

other Task Force agencies playing key supporting roles.

The resulting program, today, is a multi-agency effort, directed by Community Action staff member Beth Hopkins. The operation is divided into three major areas of responsibility—outreach, buying clubs, and special projects. Each area has its own director, also a member of the CAP staff.

According to Beth Hopkins, the arrangement works well. When people in other agencies have questions or problems in a particular area, they know exactly whom to call. This is helpful in all the areas, says Hopkins, but especially in outreach, where referrals are so important.

"We all work together," the program director says. "If another task force agency comes across a family which may be in need of food help, the staff calls us. We, in turn, make referrals to other agencies. For example, if a family needs special nutrition counseling, we'll call the Extension Service, or, if there are health problems, we'll call the State Health Department or a county health agency.

"The referral system is one of the real strong points of the combined program," Hopkins says.

Outreach is the key

The central figure in the Community Food and Nutrition Program's activities is the outreach worker. The Staff has six outreach workers—two are assigned to do city outreach, three work in the county's rural areas, and one works as a trouble-shooter helping families with special problems.

Mimi Picciano is one of the three rural outreach workers. A native of upstate New York, Ms. Picciano has lived in Lancaster County for 15 years. She's been an outreach worker since November 1976 and loves her work.

Mimi Picciano spends most of her time in the county's southern end trying to locate low-income residents in

need of food stamp assistance.

She visits the homes of people referred to her by other task force agencies. She also goes from door-to-door, explaining the program and asking questions to determine if people qualify. If this prescreening shows that a family might be eligible, Ms. Picciano sets up an appointment at the welfare office and sometimes accompanies the family to the food stamp interview. She keeps in contact with families that join the program to make sure everything is going well and that they get recertified when the time comes.

In her work with families, Ms. Picciano makes sure they understand how they can benefit from all county food and nutrition services. She arranges visits to the cannery or the nearest buying club and also makes arrangements for families to meet with Penn State nutrition aides.

Sees about 50 families

Ms. Picciano works with about 50 families a month. Many are working people who are temporarily unemployed. Others are disabled or retired and living on limited fixed incomes.

In the rural southern end of Lancaster, people are very isolated, according to Mimi. She says people always seem glad to have a visitor, and they appreciate hearing about the different community food and nutrition programs.

Some need special encouragement to take part in the programs. Senior citizens, in particular, need extra coaxing to get out and make contact with other people again. Ms. Picciano says she has seen how the projects can reduce the geographical and personal isolation people feel, so she persists with friendly and gentle persuasion.

Mimi Picciano is proud of the way Lancaster has coordinated its new program to attack related problems. "It really is satisfying to know that in at

least one area—food—families are a little better off,” she says.

Buying clubs: food and information

The Lancaster Community Food and Nutrition Program sponsors buying clubs in three communities—Lancaster, Quarryville, and Columbia. Although the clubs are targeted for the areas low-income residents, anyone may join. Membership is \$3 a year per family, and the money helps defray operating costs.

The clubs are cooperative efforts. Members have total say on what merchandise is stocked, and what the hours of operation will be. They are responsible for the club's expenses.

All three buying clubs are open all day on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. The Quarryville club is also open 5 hours on Saturday. The clubs stock canned goods, staples, fresh produce, eggs, lunch meats, cheese, frozen fish and juices, and other items members request.

The program pays the salaries of the buying club supervisor, and the three club managers. Otherwise the clubs are self-supporting.

“We're pleased about that,” says Community Food and Nutrition Program director Beth Hopkins. “That's the whole philosophy—for the clubs to be self-supporting. The Community Services Administration is not going to keep funding us year after year.

“But right now, in order to pay the managers' salaries, we'd have to mark things up so high it wouldn't save people any money to shop at the clubs.”

Getting the best price

Merchandise is now marked up only 10 percent over the wholesale cost. The buying club supervisor, Deborah Stewart, negotiates with suppliers to get the best price on items. Then each of the managers places in-

dividual orders according to the needs and wishes of their clientele. The managers also make their own deals with suppliers, especially when ordering fresh goods. Sometimes they go in on a deal together if one locates a good bargain.

Club facilities are centrally located, bright and attractive, and similar in appearance to a “Mom and Pop” grocery store.

“We want low-income people to have a store like any other store—rather than having something in a church basement, or something that might not be first rate,” explains Beth Hopkins.

Buying club members are kept well informed through a club newsletter and are urged to read labels for nutrition content. Members are also encouraged to volunteer their time, if possible, to assist in the club's non-profit operation.

Although the structure and operation of the clubs are similar, each club has unique features making it tailor-made for the community it serves.

The Columbia buying club

The first buying club opened in Columbia in February 1976. Although the building had previously been used as a cooperative store, it took a while for the club to catch on with residents.

Columbia buying club organizer Steve Keller, who has a degree in community development from Penn State, describes the reluctance of low-income Columbians: “Columbia used to be a thriving railroad center, and the people here have a lot of pride.”

Although Columbia is experiencing harder times today, he says, town residents retain their image of it as a prospering locale and are not enthusiastic over CAP-sponsored programs. Keller's club has 150 members. About 30 families shop there often.

In spite of the club's low prices Keller finds that many residents still prefer “one-stop-shopping” at the

nearby supermarket. The manager hopes a recent move to a better location will increase club business.

Beth Hopkins says Steve Keller's personality has won the club many “regulars,” especially among the area's elderly people. In fact, senior citizens make up a good portion of the club's membership.

The Quarryville buying club

The second club opened in October 1976 in Quarryville, a town in the county's rural southern end. There, people live very far apart and have no large grocery chains at which to shop.

Quarryville club manager Jim Barrett gets along well with his conservative, rural clientele, who find his enthusiasm infectious and his ability to stock “good buys” reliable.

Barrett built all the store's shelves, bins, and counters himself. He also “built” the club's membership by knocking on doors to encourage residents to join. In less than a year, the club boasted 205 members, 55 who shop there regularly. Food sales are around \$2000 a month.

In Quarryville, as in Columbia, there are many items the buying club cannot stock. Re-educating shoppers to “two-stop shop” is hard work.

“What I try to do,” Jim Barrett explains, “is to tell people when they join: Listen, I can save you some real dollars on your groceries. But you're going to have to change your habits a little. You'll have to come here and shop first, and then go wherever else you shop.”

The Lancaster City club

The newest club to open is in the city of Lancaster itself. Nearly half of the buying club's 250 members are Spanish-speaking, and many are senior citizens from nearby low-income apartment complexes.

Located in the same building as the office for the Combined Food and Nutrition Program staff, the buying

club is at the hub of much activity.

A bilingual member of the buying club assists Spanish-speaking members, and the club stocks many food items that are favorites of the Spanish-speaking clientele. Food stamp outreach materials and nutrition education pamphlets are available in English and in Spanish.

Nutrition education an important part

All three buying clubs offer shoppers a variety of free informational materials. In addition, shoppers can get help with meal planning and budgeting from Penn State nutrition aides, who visit the clubs regularly.

Bernice Wright, a nutrition aide for the county extension office, is a frequent visitor to the Lancaster buying club. Ms. Wright has worked for 6

years in the Expanded Nutrition Education Program, counseling families on a one-to-one basis in their homes as well as in community centers, such as the buying club. These days, many of the families are referred by city outreach workers.

In working with low-income families, Ms. Wright finds that the biggest problem for many people is budgeting. She encourages them to plan menus on a weekly basis, and shows them how to do this. She also helps people with shopping, sometimes accompanying them through the store as they make their selections. She also explains how to comparison shop and take advantage of the seasonal good buys and competitive prices.

Like the buying club managers, Bernice Wright is encouraging people to change their shopping habits so they can get the most nutrition out of the money they spend. She feels it's an important part of any nutrition education effort, and an important part of the comprehensive approach to helping families improve their diets.

Community gardens

Lancaster County's community garden project got underway last spring with a young social worker named Ella Newswanger searching for suitable sites. A "suitable" site had to be easy for low-income people to get to, and free. Ms. Newswanger found three.

The largest site was in the Borough of Marietta, not far from the Columbia Buying Club. An elementary school agreed to contribute a corner of its land, and a local farmer offered to plow it free of charge.

According to Ms. Newswanger, the farmer's generosity was typical of the community's reaction to the garden project. "I had a 100 percent positive response from people," she says. "They donated goods as well as services. Thanks to eager volunteers, the

garden shed was up in just 4 hours!"

Even the Marietta Fire Company got into the act, agreeing to water the garden with their fire hoses.

Enlisting gardeners

The next step was finding families interested in participating in the project. Ella Newswanger had divided the garden into 32, 20- by 40-foot plots, and she was hoping to enlist enough families to cultivate all of them.

To drum up business, she handed out flyers, visited low-income neighborhoods, put up posters in laundromats, and personally contacted people referred to her by CAP and Office of Aging outreach workers.

Personal contact turned out to be the most effective method of advertising. Though time-consuming, it achieved the desired results. Twenty families signed up—19 of them were low-income families.

Families paid for the plots according to income. The regular cost was \$4 per plot; however, families with incomes under the poverty guidelines paid only \$2, as a deposit. If they took care of their plots, they got a full refund at the end of the season.

Fertilizer was included in the rental price, and plants and seeds offered at a nominal charge. "I was able to buy plants, such as tomato plants wholesale—so the gardeners could get them for about 5 cents a plant," Ms. Newswanger explains.

One gardener's experience

One satisfied gardener at Marietta was a retired farmer, Linden Beasan. Gesturing shyly toward his neatly kept plot, he murmured, "Mine turned out pretty good, didn't it?"

Mr. Beasan was living with his married son when he first contacted Ms. Newswanger. With time on his hands and no room at home to grow anything, Mr. Beasan liked the idea of the community garden.

"The garden was a good way for



him to keep busy," Ms. Newswanger says, adding that Beastan visited his plot every day or two.

The garden plot was also a good way for Mr. Beastan to contribute to members of his extended family, who live on a very limited income. By mid-August Mr. Beastan had harvested over 5 bushels of beans, as well as a hearty crop of tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables.

"I'd like to have two plots next year," Mr. Beastan told Ella Newswanger, with pride.

Most of the gardeners at the community garden sites have a lot in common with Mr. Beastan, according to the project director. Like Mr. Beastan most have had some gardening experience but have no space available. "They're families trying to raise vege-

tables to freeze or can so they can save on their food bills," she explains.

Organization is the key

Ms. Newswanger writes a newsletter to keep in touch with the gardeners. She estimates that half of them do not have telephones. The gardeners get the "Garden News" every 2 weeks in the summer and once a month in the winter.

Getting a community garden started is mainly a matter of planning, organization, a little resourcefulness, Ella Newswanger contends. She's convinced her experience in community organization has been more valuable than her gardening skills.





Marietta Community Canning Center

The Marietta Community Canning Center is the newest special service offered by the Community Food and Nutrition Program. It opened in July with a staff of five—a supervisor, and four CETA workers. (CETA is a Department of Labor training program set up by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act.)

The canning center is for all Lancaster County residents, but there are special incentives for low-income residents to use the facilities. Families with incomes under the poverty guidelines can use the center free of charge, and they do not have to pay for jars, which are donated by the Council of Churches.

Families with incomes above the poverty guidelines buy or bring their own jars. They pay a service charge of 10 cents per quart, 5 cents per pint, and 7 cents per 2 half pints.

Complete with the latest equipment, the center has a friendly staff on hand to make the canning process fun, safe, and fast—even for beginners.

Worth the hard work

"Canning is work, but it's worth it," reports John Kops, one of the canning center's first patrons. Mr. Kops is 71 and lives alone. His sole income is a monthly social security check. He first heard about the canning center from his outreach worker Mimi Picciano, and decided he would give it a try.

With the help of supervisor Maxine Kress and her staff, Mr. Kops' first canning experience—canning green beans—was a successful and enjoyable experience for him. He has returned many times to the Marietta Center and has become an accomplished canner.

Whether they are novices or experienced canners, people are quick-

ly sold on the center, Ms. Kress says. "People find that canning at the center can be done in less than half the time it would take at home," she explains. "You can walk in with a bushel of apples, and, in 3 hours, walk out with jars of applesauce. And you go home to your own clean kitchen."

Benefits from community support

The canning center has benefited greatly from community support. Local farmers frequently donate food to be canned and distributed to needy clients. The center also gets food from co-op garden supervisor Ella Newswanger, who plants and cultivates any leftover plots.

Sometimes Maxine Kress notifies families that fresh produce is available, and they come in and can the food themselves. "I have a referral list of people who could use the food," Ms. Kress explains.

Like the other community food and nutrition programs, the canning center offers food help in a variety of ways. It also offers companionship.

"Most of the people like the fact that there are people here to help them, and people to talk to," says Maxine Kress. She hopes that word-of-mouth recommendations will increase the number of visitors to the center—especially low-income visitors.

However, according to the CFNP staff, food stamps remain the single best way of improving the nutritional level of Lancaster's low-income residents.

Says outreach supervisor Debra Shaw, "I still see food stamps as our major focus because that program brings the most benefits in dollars. People can't eat a nutritious meal if they don't have the money to buy it."

Helpful in outreach

Sometimes the supplemental services have also been helpful in encouraging people to join the Food Stamp Program. Ms. Shaw says this is especially true of senior citizens, who are often reluctant to shop with food stamps.

"I tell them to go to the buying club, where I know they will feel comfortable and where they will get extra help if they need it," says Ms. Shaw. "Many find the idea appealing."

At the buying clubs and at all the other CFNP activities, people are treated with respect and dignity. It's not surprising they keep coming back.
by Carol McLaughlin

Food stamps are the focus

The directors of the Community Food and Nutrition Program (CFNP) report that the buying clubs, community gardens, and canning center have sparked the interest of the media. While local newspapers and radio and television stations have tended to shy away from the Food Stamp Program, which is more controversial in the county, they have readily featured stories on buying clubs bargains and activities at the canning center.

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